

Parashiot Vayakel-Pekudei 5778, 2018:

Shabbat and Closeness to Hashem

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Yekutiel Yehudah ben Pessel Lifsha and Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* begins with the construction of the *Mishkan* (the portable Desert Sanctuary):

“Moses called the whole community of the children of Israel to assemble, and he said to them: ‘These are the things that the L-rd commanded to make.’” (This, and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Our immediate expectation would be for the Torah to begin to list all of the details pursuant to building the *Mishkan*. This is the case, for example, in the beginning of Parashat Terumah wherein we find precisely this manner of presentation.

Our *parasha*, however, deviates from this approach. Instead of launching into a discussion of the constitutive elements of the *Mishkan*, the Torah “interrupts itself” with two verses that speak about the sanctity of Shabbat:

Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have sanctity, a day of complete rest to the L-rd; whoever performs work thereon [on this day] shall be put to death. You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwelling places on the Sabbath day. (*Sefer Shemot* 35:2-3)

Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself upon the *Mechilta*, the halachic *Midrash* to *Sefer Shemot*, provides us with a rationale for the inclusion of these two seemingly incongruous *pasukim*: “Six days He [Moses] prefaced [the discussion of the details of] the work of the

Mishkan with the warning to keep the Sabbath, denoting that it [i.e., the work of the *Mishkan*] does not supersede the Sabbath.” In sum, the Torah is teaching us that even the construction of Hashem’s dwelling place on earth must cease at the onset of this most consecrated of all days.

Each of us experiences Shabbat and its *kedushah* (holiness) in our own unique fashion. Many of us have a favorite Shabbat time. For some, it is the Friday evening meal that is preceded by *Lecha Dodi* in Shul, and ushered in amid the singing of *Shalom Aleichem* and *Aishet Chail*. For others, it is the morning *Tefilah* (Prayer) service in synagogue, and the Torah reading, followed by the second meal. Personally, I am most deeply affected by the final meal of the day, *Seudat Shlishit*, which, perhaps, is best viewed as the last bastion of *kedushah* that separates us from weekday activities and their attendant uncertainties and anxieties. Speaking very personally, it is the time when I most experience the *neshamah yeteirah* (the extra soul) that the holiness of Shabbat bestows upon us. The singing of *Mizmor l’David* (Psalm 23), *Yedid Nefesh* and the accompanying *divrei Torah* (Torah analyses) often transport me to my highest spiritual heights, and create a transformative moment that helps me strengthen my bonds *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Many have suggested that *Mizmor l’David*, in particular, captures the ideal essence of the Jewish religious experience. It speaks of peace, serenity, and inner calm:

A song of David. The L-rd is my shepherd; I shall not want. He causes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even when I walk in the valley of darkness, I will fear no evil for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff - they comfort me. You set a table before me in the presence of my adversaries; You anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the L-rd for length of days.

My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as the Rav by his students and followers, depicted the relationship that obtains between *Seudat Shlishit* and Psalm 23 in his seminal work, *Halakhic Man*:

...it is true that during the third Sabbath meal at dusk, as the day of rest declines and man's soul yearns for its Creator and is afraid to depart from the realm of holiness whose name is Sabbath, into the dark and frightening, secular workaday week, we sing the psalm "The L-rd is my shepherd; I shall not want, He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters etc., and we believe with our entire hearts in the word of the psalmist. (Translation, Lawrence Kaplan, footnote 4, page 142)

In the Rav's view, while this psalm describes the ultimate goal of peace and serenity for a religious being, the path leading to this destination: "...is not, at the outset, a refuge of grace and mercy." In his estimation, the path of religion in general, and Judaism in particular, "...is not the royal road, but a narrow, twisting footway that threads its course along the steep mountain slope." Judaism, when lived to its fullest, when approached with intellectual daring and candor, helps one navigate: "...the straits of inner oppositions, and incongruities, spiritual doubts and uncertainties." Life, then, for the thinking religious Jew, may very well be a challenging journey filled with the trials and tribulations of a searching soul. Little wonder then, that we yearn for the ultimate tranquility portrayed by King David in *Mizmor l'David*, and that the psalm is sung during the waning hours of the seventh day when we are infused with the Shabbat's singular holiness.

With the Almighty's help, may we be *zocheh* to encounter the spiritually-transforming potential of Shabbat, and thereby achieve the closeness to Hashem we so strongly desire.

V'chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.